

William H. Culmer House
33 C Street
Salt Lake City
Salt Lake County
Utah

HABS No. UT-85

HABS
UTAH,
18-SALC
28-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WILLIAM H. CULMER HOUSE

HABS No. UT-85

HABS
UTAH
12-SALT
28-

Location: 33 C Street, Salt Lake City Salt Lake County, Utah.

Present Owner/
Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. LaMar Taft Merrill.

Present Use: Private residence.

Significance: The William H. Culmer House, with its pretensions to the Second Empire style, represents an intermediate period of luxury home construction. It was built between the earlier homes of ecclesiastical and business leaders and the later period of mining magnate mansions. The interior of the house contains fine decorative details and a unique series of secco paintings by the owner's brother, a nationally recognized painter of western landscapes.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1881.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The William H. Culmer House is built on the northern half of lot 4, Block 12, Plat D of the Salt Lake City Survey. The following references tracing the title of this lot are found in the Salt Lake County Recorder's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.

1881 Deed, signed March 15, 1881, filed March 16, 1881, recorded in Book L, pp. 560-561. Heirs of the Estate of George Simms, deceased, to William H. Culmer, all of lot 4 for \$1,400.

1881 Deed, signed March 19, 1881, filed March 19, 1881, recorded in Book J, pp. 581-582. William H. Culmer to H. L. A. Culmer, southern half of lot 4.

1900 Deed, signed May 16, 1900, filed January 1, 1901, recorded in Book 5Y, p. 332. William H. Culmer to Sarah J. Culmer, northern half of lot 4, for \$1.

1901 Deed, signed November 11, 1901, filed November 21, 1901, recorded in Book 6B, pp. 73-75. Sarah J. Culmer to Mattison B. Whitney, part of lot 4, for \$9,000.

- 1918 Court Order, signed August 23, 1918, filed September 5, 1918, recorded in Book 108, p. 256. Mattison B. Whitney, deceased, to wife, Edith B. Whitney, by Court Order, part of lot 4.
- 1944 Deed, signed March 22, 1944, filed March 22, 1944, recorded in Book 375, p. 541. Third District Court of Salt Lake County, Probate Division, Estate of Edith B. Whitney, to Anna B. Benson and C. R. Benson, part of lot 4, for \$6,000.
- 1972 After the filing of Charles R. Benson's Death Certificate on April 11, 1972, the record is unclear. The property was acquired by purchase by LaMar Taft Merrill and wife sometime during 1972.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The builder and contractor are not known; however, suppliers were undoubtedly the C. F. Culmer & Bros. firm, in which William F. Culmer was a partner. They were wholesale and retail dealers in paints, oils, varnishes, window glass and art glass. C. F. Culmer & Bros. had one of the largest trade of its kind in the Utah Territory.
5. Original plans, construction: A sketch of this house, along with the houses owned by Culmer's two brothers and business partners, George F. and Henry Lavender Adolphus, was published in 1887 (Darke, Salt Lake Illustrated, 1887). The published sketch indicates that there was no front porch on the house at that time.
6. Paintings: Paintings and decorative stencil work were added to the house shortly after its completion by William H. Culmer's brother Henry Lavender Adolphus, who lived next door to the south at 27 C Street. H.L.A. Culmer (1854--1914) was a nationally recognized painter of western landscapes. He was trained in Utah with the assistance of painter Alfred Lambourne (1850-1926). Culmer's work is imitative of a fellow American painter and acquaintance, Thomas Moran (American Art Annual, 1898; Thieme-Becker, Kunstsler Lexikon, vol. VIII; W. Young, A Dictionary of American Painters, Artists, Sculptors and Engravers; Who's Who in America, 1912-1913).

The following is a list of secco paintings and their locations:

Black Rock area of the Great Salt Lake, approx. 48" x 48", located on south wall of dining room, signed and dated 1884.

Scene from Utah War (1857-1858) in Echo Canyon, approx. 12" x 36", located on west wall, north end, of dining room, signed and dated 1884.

Mount Olympus, approx. 36" x 36", located on west wall, south end, of dining room, not signed.

Waterfall from Emigration Canyon, approx. 12" x 36", located on east wall, south end, of dining room, not signed.

Blue birch in a forest, approx. 24" x 24", located in southeast corner of ceiling of parlor, not signed.

Forest scene, approx. 24" oval, located on west side of parlor ceiling, not signed.

Forest scene in winter, approx. 24" oval, located on north side of parlor ceiling, not signed.

Stenciling appears in the following locations:

Parlor ceiling, including portion in corner tower.

Living room ceiling.

Sitting room ceiling, southeast corner (portion in corner tower).

Dining room ceiling and walls with emphasized grisaille panels of food motifs.

Entrance room ceiling: plain painted border around the edge.

In addition, the entrance hall was marblized, which is visible on the north and south walls. The dining room walls from the floor to dado height were handpainted to imitate wood paneling. Pillars painted on the surface of the wall above the dado frame the landscapes along the walls.

7. Alterations and additions: The east front porch and the west storage area and sleeping porch were added between 1889 and 1898 (Sanborn-Perris map, 1889, sheet no. 34, and Sanborn-Perris map, 1898, sheet no. 148). The latter was removed between 1974 when the HABS drawings were made and 1985 when the HABS photographs were taken.

The original fireplace in the dining room was replaced with a bow front china cabinet, ca. 1902, by the Whitneys.

Grills were added on the interior in three locations, possibly at the turn of the century when the new owners, the Whitneys, purchased the house. They were located in the entrance to the reception room, the opening between the parlor and the living room, and in the southeast corner of the parlor.

The Whitneys also had indoor plumbing installed in 1902 shortly after they moved into the house. The plumber signed his name and the date behind the bathtub on the south wall of the bathroom.

The north wall above the stairway was originally marblized but was covered with wallpaper by the present owners in 1972.

The kitchen walls, originally painted to imitate granite, were re-decorated along with the bathroom in 1972-73 by the present owners.

B. Historical Persons Connected with the Structure:

William H. Culmer (1852-1939) immigrated to America from England in 1867 and then to Utah in 1868. While a young boy in England, he became friendly with the author Charles Dickens. Late in life he wrote of his early association with Dickens in Billy the Cartwheeler, finally published in 1970.

William H. Culmer was a partner, with his two brothers, George F. and Henry Lavender Adolphus, in the highly successful commercial firm of George F. Culmer & Brothers. They were wholesale and retail dealers in paints, oils, varnishes, window and art glass. They also manufactured mirrors, showcases, and stained glass. In addition, they owned the Western Cornice Works, manufacturers of galvanized iron work. The brothers were also "practical owners" of the Wasatch Asphaltum Co., principal owners of the Wasatch Marble Quarries, editors and publishers of the "Journal of Commerce" (devoted to mining and manufacturing interests in Utah) and owners of the Culmer Block in downtown Salt Lake City.

The subsequent owner of the house, Mattison B. Whitney, was the Secretary and Treasurer of the Utah Implement Co. He lived in the house until 1912, according to the Salt Lake City Directory. He died in Salt Lake City on April 25, 1917, at the age of 59.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Early views: A sketch of the house and the houses owned by Culmer's brothers was published in S. W. Darke, Salt Lake Illustrated, Salt Lake City: S. W. Darke, 1887.
2. Interviews: LaMar Taft Merrill, Salt Lake City, August 20, 1974.
3. Bibliography:
 - a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Culmer, H. L. A., Scrapbook. Microfilm copy at the Utah State Historical Society.

Sanborn-Perris Maps, "Salt Lake City." 1889, sheet no. 34.
1898, sheet no. 148.

b. Secondary and published sources:

American Art Annual, 1898. New York: MacMillan, 1899, p.
436.

Culmer, William H. Billy the Cartwheeler. Metuchen, N.J.:
Scarecrow Press, 1970.

Manly and Litteral, eds. Utah: Her Cities, Towns and
Resources. Chicago, 1891.

Marquis, Albert Nelson, ed. Who's Who in America,
1912-1913. Chicago: A.N. Marquis & Co., 1912, p. 494.

Polk, R. L., ed. Salt Lake City Directory. Salt Lake City,
Utah: R. L. Polk and Co., various years from 1880-1917.

Thieme-Becker. Kuntsler Lexikon, vol. VIII. Leipzig: Verlag
von E. A. Seemann, 1913, p. 192.

Writers' Program, Works Progress Administration for the
State of Utah. Utah, a Guide to the State. New York:
Hastings House, 1941.

Young, William, ed. and comp. A Dictionary of American
Artists, Sculptors and Engravers. Cambridge, Mass.: William
Young & Co., 1968. p. 120.

Prepared by: Peter L. Goss
Architectural Historian
Graduate School of
Architecture
University of Utah
November, 1974

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building has Second Empire-style details, including a mansard roof on a corner tower.
2. Condition of fabric: good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: An irregularly shaped building, 46'-10" x 48'-4", with an octagonal tower at the southeast corner and a rectangular bay on the north side. The house has a hipped roof except for the mansard on the octagonal tower.
2. Foundations: kyune sandstone.
3. Walls: salmon-colored smooth soft burned brick.
4. Structural system, framing: brick bearing walls with wood floor and roof framing system.
5. Porches: Porch along the east front has wooden tapered columns on stone bases. The porch roof is surmounted by a decorative balustrade.
6. Chimneys: four brick chimneys with corbeled caps.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: mahogany double doors at the main entrance.
 - b. Windows and shutters: the one-over-one-light windows have trimmed sandstone drip moldings and sills. The one-story bay window on the north side is wooden.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: hip roof. The mansard roof over the tower has fishscale shingles.
 - b. Dormers: The three dormers on the octagonal tower are half-octagonal shaped, surmounted by urns. The sash have one-over-one lights.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans:
 - a. Basement: Partial basement with brick floor under the reception hall, dining room, kitchen and pantry. Stone foundations and brick walls are exposed.
 - b. First floor: See plans.

- c. Second floor: See plans. The bedroom and bath in the northwest corner are four steps lower than the rest of the floor.
 - d. Third floor: the tower, which is off of the sitting room, has a stair leading up to a single room on the third floor.
 - e. Attic: The attic space is unfinished.
- 2. Stairways: The open stair runs from the first to the second floor. The handrail runs unbroken from a newel post at the bottom of the stairs and around the well on three sides. An enclosed stairway runs beneath the main stairway to the basement.
 - 3. Flooring: First floor has walnut, oak and maple with parquetry border. The second floor is red cedar throughout, now covered with carpet.
 - 4. Wall and ceiling finish: a series of secco paintings and stencil work cover the plaster finish in the dining room, parlor and living room. They are more fully explained in the "Paintings" section above.
 - 5. Doorways and doors: paneled doors with a modified plaster trim occur on the main floor and a simpler trim occurs on the second floor. Various openings have grillwork within the archways.
 - 6. Heating: forced warm air furnace and duct system.
- D. Site:
- 1. General setting and orientation: The house faces east onto C Street. A sandstone wall extends along the east and north property lines. Access to the building is along a circular walk connected to the C Street sidewalk. There are wrought-iron gates at both ends of the circular walk.
 - 2. Outbuildings: A detached garage of more recent vintage is located in the rear yard.

Prepared by: Burtch W. Beall, Jr.
Project Supervisor
Graduate School of
Architecture
University of Utah
November, 1974

III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The State of Utah survey, conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey, was cosponsored by the National Park Service and the Utah Heritage Foundation and supported by the Utah American Revolution Bicentennial Commission and the Utah State Institute of Fine Arts jointly with the National Endowment for the Arts. All work was recorded under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, during the summer of 1974 at the Historic American Buildings Survey Field Office at the Graduate School of Architecture, University of Utah. The survey team consisted of Burtch W. Beall, Jr., architect (University of Utah), project supervisor; Dr. Peter L. Goss, project historian; student architects Ronnie B. Cullen (Washington State University), Clayton B. Fraser (University of Tennessee), William B. Klein (University of Utah), and Eric V. Ramsing (University of Oregon). Photographs were taken by Louise T. Taft in 1985. The written data were edited by Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Historian, in 1985.